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Review

Political apparatchiks and governance in Ghana's fourth republic

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Political apparatchiks play a major role in ensuring the electoral victory of their respective political parties. They are also expected to strive hard to keep their parties in power to ensure that they deliver on their promises to make the life of the ordinary citizenry more comfortable and decent. However, their activities sometimes pose a severe challenge to governance. Using Ghana's Fourth Republic as a cases study, this paper discusses the evolution and role of political apparatchiks and the challenges their activities pose to governance in Ghana.

Keywords: Apparatchiks; Governance; Ghana; Fourth Republic

INTRODUCTION

Ghana's Fourth Republican Constitution was drafted and approved by Ghanaians in a referendum in1992. Prior to this, the First (1960), Second (1969) and Third (1979) Republican Constitutions had been abandoned. Other democratic practices including the creation of a conducive environment for political parties to thrive were all shelved. These were as a result of military interventions and adventurism in the Ghanaian body politic (Shillington, 1992). The approval of the Fourth Republican Constitution and the lifting of the ban on partisan politics therefore led to the re-surfacing of political parties such as the New Patriotic Party (NPP) People's Heritage Party (PHP) EAGLE Party, the People's National Convention, etc. Interestingly, President Jerry John Rawlings who had ruled the country for close to eleven years after toppling the regime of Dr. Hilla Limann and abandoning the Third Republican Constitution n 1982, also formed his political party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC). He campaigned for votes in Ghana's first election under the Fourth Republic which took place in 1992 and won massively. He was however severely criticized for rigging the elections due to the un-even playing field on which the electoral battle was fought (Oquaye, 1995). Indeed, the NPP went on to published the "Stolen Verdict" in which they catalogued several irregularities before and during the elections. Jerry Rawlings again retained his position as the head of state in the 1996 elections (ibid). His party was however voted out both in the 2000 and 2004 elections and regained power in 2008 with Professor J.E.A Mills as president.

The Literature Gap

The reasons for these electoral outcomes have been analyzed by Borre (1998), Jonah (1998), Allah-Mensah (1998), Ayee (2000), Verlet (1998), Bluwey (1998), Boafo-Arthur (2004), Ansah-Koi (1998), Saaka (1998), Oquaye (1998), Drah (2000), Gyimah-Boadi (2000), Frempong (2004), Ninsin (2004), Essuman-Johnson (2004), Gyampo and Obeng Odoom (2009), Whitfiled (2009), Kelly (2009), Kennedy (2009), Botchwey (2010) etc. However, till date, no study has looked at the role of apparatchiks. In this study, the relevance of this group to winning elections in Ghana is shown. Again, the threats and challenges they pose to governance after their parties have been elected to power are analyzed. It is important to note that no meaningful analysis of the electoral victories of political parties can be made without reference to the core role of party "apparatchiks". Leaders in Ghana's Fourth Republic may have been charismatic and presented good policies, programmes and manifestoes during the electioneering campaigns of the Fourth Republic. However, in this paper, it is argued that these were not enough to have catapulted them into power. In every political party, there are those who provide funding for it; those who sit on the fence as passive members; and the "apparatchiks" who can always be counted on to defend the party at all times. It is the "apparatchiks" who have provided the real shoulders upon which leaders of Ghana's Fourth Republic have climbed on to political power. However, like a two-edged sword, they also create serious problems with

governance for their leaders when their party is elected into power. The central thesis of this paper therefore, is that even though political "apparatchiks" play enormous role in Ghana's democratic practice, they also play certain destructive roles that if not checked, could sacrifice good governance and erode the democratic gains of the country. So, who are political "apparatchiks"?. How did they evolve and what role did they play in politics?. What role do they play in Ghana's Fourth Republican democratic dispensation? What challenges do they pose to governance and democracy?. How can such challenges be minimized? Attempts are made to address these research questions in the paper. In the next section of the paper, the term "political apparatchiks" is defined and discussed in some detail. This is followed by a discussion of the role they play in ensuring electoral victory as well as the challenges they pose to governance in Ghana's Fourth Republic. Conclusions and policy recommendations are finally made.

Political Apparatchiks Defined

The word apparatchik is a colloquial of Russian origin which was used to denote a full-time, professional functionary of the Communist Party or government; i.e., an agent of the governmental or party "apparat" (apparatus) that held any position of bureaucratic or political responsibility, with the exception of the higher ranks of management. James Billington describes an apparatchik as "a man not of grand plans, but of a hundred carefully executed details." (Billington, 1999:455) Members of the "apparat" were frequently transferred between different areas of responsibility, usually with little or no actual training for their new areas of responsibility (Pearson, 1998:20) Thus, the term apparatchik, or "agent of the apparatus" was usually the best possible description of the person's profession and occupation (Huntford, 1972:135). Today, this term is also used in contexts other than the Soviet Union. For example, it is often used to describe people who cause bureaucratic bottlenecks in otherwise efficient organizations. It is also frequently used to describe individuals, appointed to positions in any government, on the basis of ideological or political loyalty rather than competence (Lane and Ross, 1999:25-26). Finally, in this paper, "apparatchiks" are defined as party foot-soldiers who work so hard to ensure the election of their respective parties into power and can always be counted on to respect and tow the party line with great gusto (ibid).

Political apparatchiks evolved in the Soviet Union as lower rank supporters of the Russian Communist party. They functioned in governance not necessarily as competent appointees but as party loyalists (Huntford, 1972:136). In their quest to represent the interest of the Communist party in the decision making process, they insisted on ideological purity of policies, thereby causing delays and bureaucratic bottlenecks in political organizations (Lane and Ross, 1999:127). The position of political apparatchiks also was an anti-thesis on the desirable concept of meritocracy that according to Max Weber (1947) must feature prominently in political appointments. Nevertheless, apparatchiks were responsible for ensuring that there was no disconnect between party programmes and government policies, thereby making the Communist Party very strong (Huntford, 1972:134). The role of party apparatchiks, irrespective of how divisive it may seem, is often not intended to break their parties. Instead, they seek to ensure that their parties get elected and hold on to the reins of political power (ibid). However, their activities after their parties have been elected to power poses threats to good governance. They tend to put a lot of pressure on their elected leaders, particularly the political executive in a manner that does not allow the government or party leadership the free mind to govern objectively and independently (ibid)

In Ghana, the evolution of political apparatchiks may be traced to the PNDC era where organized groups such as the "Mobisquad", Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), Workers Defense Committees (WDCs) Peoples Defense Committees (PDCs) and other mass youth were trained and armed to defend the revolution. In the Fourth Republic, various wings such as the Women's and Youth Wings of Political Parties, particularly the two main ones, were formed. These wings were made up of die-hard or core foot soldiers (Asante 2006:222). Under the Fourth Republic, therefore, the concept of political "apparatchiks" is borrowed to refer to the category of lower rank party supporters, popularly referred to as the "foot-soldiers" who worked hard to get their parties elected and sought (or were given) political appointments and other favours. It is a common knowledge that political "apparatchiks" in Ghana, (unlike their Russian counterparts) who have worked their way into government have not been able to ensure a reflection of party programmes in national or government policies. This has led to a perceived disconnect between the manifestoes of the party that elected the leaders of the Fourth Republic and the policies the leaders initiate as governments. Nevertheless, it is probably appropriate to use the term "political apparatchiks" to refer to the lower rank party supporters in Ghana because they typify most of the characteristics of their counterparts in the then Soviet Union.

The Role of Party Apparatchiks

Party apparatchiks have played an important role in both local and national politics since the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic in 1993. They have served as foot-soldiers and vehicles through which party manifestoes

have been transmitted to the electorate, particularly those in the hinterlands. In all elections held under the Fourth Republic, they have played the crucial role of serving as polling agents during registration and voting exercises. As polling agents, they promote fairness and transparency in the electioneering process especially during voter registration exercises which are crucial for the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and their acceptability to all. For example, the decision of some parties to use local or indigenous "apparatchiks" to monitor polling centers especially in the rural communities during the 2008 elections contributed immensely towards the checking of impersonation (Asante, 2006:215).

Another key role of party apparatchiks in the political process lies in their zeal in making the presence of their parties felt across the country. They are often seen chanting their party slogans and moving from house to house, campaigning for their parties in an attempt to win more supporters. In the 2004 general elections for instance, the NPP apparatchiks used the propaganda that a vote for Professor Mills of the NDC would mean a vote for former President Rawlings (ibid:220). This propaganda seemed to have worked in almost all the areas that the NPP won the elections in spite of all efforts by the NDC youth and apparatchiks to disabuse the minds of the electorate regarding the NPP's propaganda.

Furthermore, party apparatchiks have also served as pressure groups within their parties and often brought pressure to bear on national executives over pertinent issues, including matters bordering on internal democracy. Some of them have resisted attempts by party executives to impose parliamentary candidates on them in their constituencies. For instance, in the run up to the 2008 parliamentary elections of Ghana the NPP apparatchiks embarked on massive demonstrations, in an attempt to press home their disapproval of persons whose candidature they saw as an imposition on them by the party executives. In the Ablekuma South, Abirem, Bekwai, and Suhum constituencies, it sometimes resulted in violent clash with the security agencies (ibid).

In addition, "apparatchiks" of the two main political parties in Ghana, the NDC and NPP in particular, organized series of press conferences, and issued press statements to enlighten voters about their party positions on pertinent national issues and in some cases to deny allegations made against their party. For example, it was the NDC apparatchiks in Tamale who held a press conference to refute allegations of corruption leveled against the Northern Regional Minister, Stephen Sumani Nayina in October 2009 in a Daily Guide (an Accra based newspaper) report. Furthermore, party "apparatchiks" have been instrumental in organizing party rallies and the hoisting of party flags in an attempt to socialize Ghanaians about the ideals of their respective parties (ibid:227).

Moreover, in Ghana, just as in many emerging democracies, fund raising activities for political parties is crucial because of the lack of political parties by the state. Since no meaningful party activity can be embarked upon without funding, political apparatchiks continue to support their parties to embark upon several activities aimed at raising funds, for example, through the sale and distribution of party cards and other paraphernalia (ibid).

It is worth adding that, in their quest to defend their parties to the hilt, some political apparatchiks have also engaged in violent activities. Indeed, many young apparatchiks, especially youth activists, have been involved in most of the inter-party and intra-party conflicts. There are several reported cases where young "apparatchiks" of the two leading parties have clashed over the venue, timing for organizing rallies and other seemingly petty issues. In October 2004, for instance, apparatchiks of the NDC and NPP clashed in the Yendi constituency during an NDC rally (CDD-Ghana, 2005:30). Again during the elections in the Tolon/Kumbungu district in 2004, NPP "apparatchiks" stormed an NDC stronghold to investigate allegations of under-aged voting. This led to a clash between the two groups resulting in the death of two persons (Heritage, 2005:1-3). In some constituencies, ballot boxes were stolen and burnt by the young "apparatchiks" of both the NPP and the NDC. These constituencies include Mion and Tolon in the Northern Region and New Edubiase in the Ashanti Region. Party "apparatchiks" were also involved in the destruction of bill boards, posters etc of their opponents as well as physical assaults of their rival contestants (Asante, 2006:229). In 2009, the Akwatia re-run and Chereponi bye-elections as well as the Atiwa bye-elections in 2010 also witnessed violence perpetrated by party apparatchiks of the NPP and NDC.

Regarding intra-party conflicts, party apparatchiks supporting different parliamentary aspirants in the same party have often clashed. Violent confrontations oftentimes characterized press conferences convened by party executives particularly at the constituency level. Again, the decision by some aspiring candidates, who lost primaries, to contest as independent candidates has often led to intra-party conflict with the party apparatchiks being the main protagonists (Asante, 2006).

DISCUSSION

CHALLENGES POSED TO GOVERNANCE BY POLITICAL APPARATCHIKS

The role of apparatchiks after their parties have been elected to power poses threats to good governance. In Ghana especially in the Mills administration, they have embarked upon several acts of hooliganism and vandalism in a manner that could affect the ability of the

executive to freely govern objectively and independently. The damning criticism being suffered by President Mills from within his own party as a result of the demands by party apparatchiks for example is not new. In the Third Republic, the Limann regime suffered a similar challenge. He encountered severe criticisms from within his own party in a manner that made him lost focus and failed to effectively govern the country. Indeed, this created a state of praetorianism within his party and government that led to his overthrow by Rawlings (Shillington, 1992). It should also be noted that one other reason for Limann's woes was that he was not a founding member of the PNP. He was therefore, perceived to be an outsider to the party. The first NDC regime led by former President Rawlings did not suffer much criticism and demands from party apparatchiks because most supporters were mindful of the military high handedness that characterized the PNDC regime. The few daring ones like Ato Austin, Obed Asamoah, Christene Churcher, and other former PNDC members who tried to challenge and criticize him or his administration were either sidelined, subtly expelled or made to remain docile (Ahwoi, 2010). During former President J.A. Kufuor's regime, the issue about perceived disconnect between his government and party apparatchiks led to severe criticisms and internal wrangling. To minimize this, he co-opted the party national chairman and general secretary as members of his cabinet so that they can explain government policy and issues to the party "apparatchiks" in order to prevent a situation of feeling sidelined (Ntow, 2008). Even though this arrangement could not work to perfection and he was blamed for ignoring party "apparatchiks", the Mills regime is continuing with this arrangement (Ahwoi, 2010).

Like his predecessor, President Mills is suffering monumental criticisms from within his own party. These criticisms have either been directed at his health or his style of leadership. While some have felt that the president is not healthy to lead the country and has therefore allowed "others behind the scene" to dictate to him, others have criticized him for surrounding himself with young and inexperienced ministers and being too slow in dealing with former government functionaries for their alleged corrupt acts when they were in government (Ahwoi, 2010). Some of these damning and in most cases less constructive criticisms have either been leveled against the president directly by the apparatchiks or by top gurus like the founder, Rawlings and his wife; Alban Bagbin, the majority leader in parliament; Dr. Ekow Spio-Garbrah, a former presidential aspirant of the NDC; Alfred Agbesie and Michael Teye Nyaunu who are both NDC MPs. Interestingly, these top gurus often claimed their criticisms reflected of the views of the apparatchiks of the party. Perhaps, like Limann, President Mills is also seen not to be a party-man but an outsider. His zeal to rule according to law and his own conscience and not to follow the dictates of the "real party men and owners of the party" is therefore being met with opposition from the apparatchiks on whose shoulders he climbed to power (Ahwoi, 2010). It must be noted that unlike the Limann regime, Ghana, has currently reached a stage in her democratic practice where it will probably be difficult for any soldier to intervene and cease power (ibid). However, internal wrangling and destructive criticisms by party apparatchiks could bring untold hardships and suffering to people. Such internal wrangling could simply be distracting to policy makers from effectively governing and force them to focus on issues that may not benefit the interest of the entire citizenry.

In every democracy, it is important for leaders to tolerate dissenting views and criticisms, particularly the constructive ones. However, criticisms may cease to be constructive when appropriate channels through which they can be made within a party are not utilized and exhausted. Such criticisms must also be based on issues germane to national development (Botchwey, 2010). Granted this, it is completely out of place for political apparatchiks who worked to get their parties elected into power to criticize officials appointed on merit simply because they were not part of the struggle to capture power. Oftentimes, apparatchiks unnecessarily vent their spleen on competent appointed officials simply because they (appointed officials) are perceived to be "chopping" the goodies and niceties associated with power in a manner typical of the popular Ghanaian saying "*monkey dey work, baboon dey chop*." The criticisms being leveled against the Chief of Staff, Mr. J.H Martey Newman by party "apparatchiks" is an excellent example. Some are even calling for his removal because he is not a "party man" (Ahwoi, 2010).

Unfortunately, to be seen as a political hero in Ghana under the Mills' regime, it seems the only thing one has to do is to "go public in the media" to criticize the president, damning the consequences for the party and its internal cohesion. The tendency for such destructive criticisms to demoralize the president, frustrate and make him lose focus on key national development issues as it happened to Limann leading to his overthrow cannot be under-estimated. A recent directive issued by President Mills to all political appointees to pay attention to the needs of party apparatchiks can be attributed to the frustrating and destructive pressures piled on the president. Upon issuing such a directive, the president has received several condemnations and criticisms from Ghanaians including some from his own party for such a directive because it violates his presidential oath he swore to do good to all manner of persons. Unfortunately, no serious effort is being made by the party apparatchiks to defend the president for issuing such an unpopular directive.

Good governance is not about wrangling, parochially partisan demands and destructive criticisms but one that requires sanity, peace, tranquility and harmony to address real problems facing the nation. Good governance encourages the expression of diverse

opinions which will ultimately lead to development, unlike wrangling that tend to shift attention from meeting the needs of the entire citizenry to finding solutions to internal partisan squabbles by party "apparatchiks"(Jonah, 2005). Obviously, this is not to say that intra-party wrangling must be left unattended to when they are well-founded. There is a growing demand that soon after leaders are elected, their "apparatchiks" must necessarily take over the reins of governance and occupy key decision making positions. Others in opposition are to be treated with contempt, fired from their positions, arrested and be thrown into jail (Cook and Ayee, 2006). It was against this background that NDC apparatchiks soon after the party's victory in 2008 were reported to have seized public toilets, markets and car parks being managed by suspected party loyalists of the NPP (Ahwoi 2010). In other parts of the country, they chased administrators of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) etc from their offices, issuing death threats and calling for their replacement with NDC loyalists. For instance, on January 13, 2010, one Steve Asare and Inusah Abu stormed the NYEP office in Obuasi with a group of NDC apparatchiks and attacked Fredrick Addai, the Deputy Coordinator, when the complainant and other witnesses were at the office working. Members of the group, who were armed with butcher's knives, daggers and other armed gang operational appurtenances, assaulted Addai, the complainant, and forced him and other officers of the NYEP out of the office. They later barricaded the office and placed it under lock and key before they fled the scene, prosecution indicated (Ahwoi, 2010). Again, on 13th July 2010, Shakespear Ofori Atta, a youth activist and NDC constituency Secretary in Kyebi, the Abuakwa South Constituency led a group of irate NDC apparatchiks to chase out workers in the NHIS office and locked the place. They claimed the NDC, barely two years in power had not fulfilled its campaign promise of getting them all employed. Similar events happened during the NPP regime (2001-2008) where some officials were dismissed while others were asked to proceed on leave; and cars belonging to officials of the previous administration were seized by their apparatchiks (Ahwoi, 2010).

Suffice it to say however, that one key principle of good governance is equal treatment of all, irrespective of partisan coloration. Indeed, good governance and the kind of politics that treats party apparatchiks different from their counterparts in the other political divide cannot be bed-fellows. Even though one important ingredient of good governance is popular participation in the decision making process, good governance must necessarily thrive on meritocracy (Goldsmith, 2005). Therefore comments like the chief-of- staff at the Mills' presidency not being a party-man in my view, begs the question. This is because in a developing country like Ghana, it is wise for our national developmental agenda to be spearheaded by experts, technocrats and people whose positions are given to them on merit (ibid). Many African countries are less developed because in making political appointments leaders have often kowtowed to the demands, whims and caprices of party apparatchiks irrespective of their qualifications (Ayee, 2008).

CONCLUSION

In making concluding remarks, two main issues must be re-stated. First of all, looking at the invaluable role and support of party "apparatchiks", one is tempted to ask whether they should be given preferential and favorable treatment to the neglect of the other Ghanaians who do not belong to any political party or those at the other political divide. If this becomes the route to go, it will surely give presidents some peace and assure them of partisan support. However, apart from this being inimical to good governance, the whole nation may have to contend with the appointment of people who may not necessarily be qualified to man key positions of decision making. This may sacrifice national development. It must quickly be added here that appointments that are based on meritocracy and competence from within the ruling party are acceptable. The second issue is whether leaders should make political appointments on merit and irrespective of the political divide one may come from. This will in no doubt bring into governance and decision making competent people capable of steering the affairs of the nation to development. However, as the evidence in Ghana now shows, leaders who go this route may have to contend with destructive criticisms that stems from the fact that "apparatchiks" who worked for the party to win elections may feel sidelined. The impact and telling effect of this on the popularity of leaders in their own party are monumental.

The enormity of the contributions of political apparatchiks in supporting leaders and ensuring their election to power in Ghana under the Fourth Republic cannot be under-estimated. However their activities after elections present serious dilemmas to leaders and challenges to good governance. Finding a synthesis between their parochially partisan interests and the entire needs of the general citizenry has been problematic. Giving in to the interest of apparatchiks may make presidents popular and give them some peace within their own parties. However, it cannot be part of good governance for all political appointments and favors to be given to party "apparatchiks" alone to the total neglect of others and national development as a whole.

Policy Recommendation / Way Forward

From the foregone discussions, the following policy recommendations are worth considering:

• Democracy is yet to take firm roots in Ghana. Granted this, one can argue that many Ghanaians do not have firm grasp of its full tenets. It is therefore important for a continuous education of the entire citizenry about the work of elected leaders to be carried out. Such educative programmes should drive home the point that even though parties produce presidents, once elected, they are answerable to all Ghanaians and not to party apparatchiks irrespective of the role they may have played in getting the leaders elected (Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom: 2009).

• Some measure of recognition and appreciation must be given to party apparatchiks. It may not be politically wise a decision to totally ignore them once leaders are elected. Leaders must therefore, strive to frequently interact with them and where necessary, appoint the qualified ones amongst them into positions of decision making.

• Leaders must be firm, strong and remain focused in order to be able to withstand political turbulence within their own parties. They should not lose focus as a result of internal party wrangling and demands from apparatchiks but should remain resolute in pursuing policies aimed at ensuring national development and not partisan or sectarian interests.

• There should be a policy to effectively deal with the general unemployment situation facing the country. Many party apparatchiks who throng the offices of ministers, DCEs, and the presidency in search of favours do so because they are not employed (Ahwoi, 2010). There may be a few of them who may be looking for other favours. However, a huge chunk of them may be unemployed. Such people become agitated and feel sidelined when they are unable to have access to the top government functionaries for favours and other issues that could have been dealt with had they been gainfully employed.

• Political parties must also strive to build credible and effective internal mechanisms that can serve as a channel for ventilating and dealing with grievances of "apparatchiks". This grievance handling mechanism must be proactive and swift in dealing with complaints in a manner that will ensure good image and respect for its activities by party apparatchiks, political leaders and other agents of decision making in the party. This will nip in the bud the growing spate of politicians and "apparatchiks" washing the dirty lining of their parties in public. This does not work well for the party's internal cohesion and may ultimately affect its electoral fortunes.

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